Discussion Topic – Dark UX Patterns

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DISCUSSION TOPIC: Case: Dark UX Patterns

Within the “initial post”, I have chosen the topic of **“Case: Dark UX Patterns”.**

The **“Dark UX Patterns”** are strategies in the designs that have been employed to exploit cognitive biases to manipulate customers or users into taking actions that they are either not aware of or it is not in their best interests. These patterns can include misdirection, forced continuity, and other tactics that make it difficult for users to make informed decisions.

These patterns raise ethical concerns by undermining users’ autonomy and trust (McGregor, 2020).

Most of the common examples that have negatively impacted human decisions are:

- **Hidden opt-outs for subscriptions:** Many websites and apps make it difficult to cancel subscriptions, often burying the cancellation option in the fine print. This can lead users to inadvertently sign up for recurring charges they don't want (Tucker, 2019).

- **Sneaky defaults:** Some platforms pre-select options that benefit the platform, not the user. For example, a checkbox for additional software might be pre-selected during software installations, leading users to install unwanted software.

- **Roach Motel:** This pattern makes it easy to get into a commitment but challenging to get out. For example, an app might let users sign up for a free trial but then make it difficult to cancel the subscription before the trial period ends (McGregor, 2020).

- **Bait and switch:** This tactic involves advertising a product or service at a specific price but changing the price once the user clicks through (Tucker, 2019). For example, a website might advertise a free service trial but then

require users to pay a subscription fee after the trial period ends.

- **Fear of missing out (FOMO):** This pattern uses notifications or other tactics to create a sense of urgency, leading users to make hasty decisions without proper consideration. For example, a website might notify that a product is about to sell out, leading users to buy the product without fully considering whether they need it (Narayanan & Lefort, 2016).

To address these concerns, design professionals should adhere to ethical guidelines emphasising honesty, fairness, and privacy. Regulatory bodies have also begun acting against companies that use dark UX patterns.

In conclusion, dark UX patterns are manipulative and unethical design tactics that should be avoided. Upholding ethical principles and adopting user-centred design approaches are essential to ensure that interfaces are transparent, respectful, and beneficial for users.

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REPLY

by Nithya Kanakavelu - Sunday, 20 August 2023, 6:03 PM

In the initial post, Biswas (2023) had provided a comprehensive overview of the concept of "Dark UX Patterns" (ACM, 2018) and their potential negative impact on users' autonomy and trust. It highlighted various common examples of these patterns that have the potential to manipulate users' decisions in ways that are not in their best interests. The examples provided, such as hidden opt-outs for subscriptions, sneaky defaults, roach motel, bait and switch, and fear of missing out (FOMO), illustrated how these patterns exploit cognitive biases and lead to unintended or unfavorable outcomes for users.

The author had emphasised the ethical concerns raised by dark UX patterns and underscores the importance of design professionals adhering to ethical guidelines that prioritise honesty, fairness, and privacy. It also noted the regulatory actions taken against companies that employ such tactics, indicating a growing recognition of the negative impact of dark UX patterns in the industry.

In addition, I would recommend the author could further discuss about practical actions computer professionals could contribute to when the managers fail to adhere with the principles of the BCS code of conduct (BCS, 2021)
The design professionals should consider users and engage them when designing systems for e-commerce. Gray et al. (2021) had explored user engagement with data privacy and security through consent banners in internet services and concluded by advocating for transdisciplinary dialogue across various fields to address ethical concerns through public policy.

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REPLY

by Panagiotis Koilakos - Sunday, 27 August 2023, 10:17 PM

In the initial post, Biswas (2023) goes through the Dark UX Patterns utilized in web design, which aim to trick users into committing unwanted actions, such as opting in for unwanted services or making it difficult for them to opt-out.

In the era of GDPR, especially during the early compliance stages, another "work-around" that websites used, which falls under the Dark UX Patterns, was either hiding (or making transparent) the cookie message (while automated compliance systems still considered the website as compliant) or making it difficult to users to opt-out from the use of cookies. Tung (2020) argues that companies that make it difficult for users to opt-out from cookies are not only employing unethical practices but are also breaking the law, with half of the websites studied not having a 'reject all' button and only 12.6% of the websites that do have the said option making it as easy to reject cookies as it is to accept them (Nouwens et al., 2020).

Additionally, apart from the ethical considerations and the potential reputational risks, the legal troubles and, therefore, the financial implications are not negligible. For example, in 2015, LinkedIn was ordered by San Jose's U.S. District Court to pay 13 million USD in settlement as part of a class action lawsuit due to employing Dark UX Patterns (Brownlee, 2015).

To summarize, employing Dark UX Patterns is definitely unethical, as analyzed in the initial post. At the same time, companies should consider all areas that can constitute usage of Dark UX Patterns (e.g. GDPR compliance) as the reputational and financial risks are more significant than the short-term benefits.

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